

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

1600 NINTH STREET, Room 322
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814
TDD 654-2054 (For the Hearing Impaired)
(916) 654-1884



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MARCH 26, 2003

CONTACT: PAUL VERKE
(916) 654-1884

GOVERNOR DECLARES MARCH AS "EARLY START MONTH"

Interagency Coordinating Council will meet March 27-28, 2003 in Sacramento

SACRAMENTO – Governor Gray Davis has declared March as "Early Start Month" to recognize the efforts of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and the interagency system of coordinated services that annually provides early intervention services to nearly 40,000 California children who have or are at risk of developmental disabilities.

"The department and our partners recognize the critical importance of identifying infants and toddlers with special needs and providing the needed services as early as possible in their lives. Research shows that significant brain growth occurs during the first three years of life," said DDS Director Cliff Allenby.

"The Governor's proclamation supports and acknowledges the many parents and professionals who participate daily in the activities of Early Start," Allenby said.

"We appreciate Governor Davis' support and recognition of the importance of early intervention for our youngest and most vulnerable Californians," said Raymond M. Peterson, M.D., chairperson of the State Interagency Coordinating Council on Early Intervention.

The Early Start Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) identified the top three priorities for California's Early Start program for fiscal year 2003-04:

- increase access to services;
- improve community education and outreach; and
- improve collaboration among service agencies and programs.

These priorities will be discussed at the ICC meeting on March 27-28, 2003 at the Holiday Inn Capitol Plaza, in Sacramento.

The Early Start program receives nearly \$45 million annually from the federal Department of Education under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Since the implementation of the program in 1993, more than 107,000 infants and toddlers have benefited from early intervention services. Families who think their child may be at risk of developmental disability can call **1-800-515-BABY**. For a list of free Early Start brochures and other early intervention materials, contact Early Start Resources, 429 J Street, Sacramento, CA 95814, (916) 492-4025 or (800) 869-4337.

For a copy of Governor Gray Davis' Early Start Month proclamation and a complete online Early Start resource directory, please visit the DDS website at: <http://www.dds.ca.gov/EarlyStart/ESHome.cfm>

#

"Building Partnerships, Supporting Choices"